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Using a Vacuum Pump *(1 of 4)*

Information for spinally injured patients

This leaflet is for guidance only; we recommend that you follow the instructions given by your clinician before using this equipment.

What is a vacuum pump?

A vacuum pump is a device used to achieve and sustain an erection. These devices can be either hand controlled or battery operated.

Each type of vacuum pump includes an instruction manual and/or a demonstration DVD/video.

How does the vacuum pump achieve erection?

An erection is caused by blood entering and filling the sponge-like tissue areas in the penis.

A vacuum pump can create an erection by drawing blood into the penis. This expands the spongy tissue which fills with blood, resulting in an erection.

Once the penis is engorged with blood, a constriction ring is placed around the base of the erection. The constriction ring ensures that the blood remains in the penis to maintain a firm erection, until the ring is removed.

When using a vacuum pump you are working with an artificial means of drawing blood into the penis. In many cases this can be faster than the body would normally operate. If this occurs it may result in a 'soft' erection.

The fact that you can achieve a 'soft' erection means that the system is working for you and the following instructions should allow you to slow down the rate of blood entering the penis and so create a 'hard' erection.

How do I use the vacuum pump?

There are many different types of vacuum pumps available, but the principles of achieving an erection are the same.

With a battery-operated pump we recommend that you turn the dial to the lowest position. Place your penis in the cylindrical penile tube and with the motor turned on, very, very slowly turn the dial towards the high position. Stop when your penis is fully erect in the penile tube. This may be before you reach the highest position on the dial.

This will allow a longer time for the penis to fill with blood and so create a 'hard' erection.

The Pressure Clinic
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If you need this information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact the Customer Care Team on 0800 374 208 email: customercare@salisbury.nhs.uk.

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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With practice you will find the setting to suit you.

With hand-operated pumps, count to 10 after each full squeeze of the pump handle. Again, this will allow more time for the blood to flow fully into the penis.

Using the minimum amount of vacuum necessary to achieve erection helps to prevent bruising around the penis. It is normal for some bruising to occur when first using the pump.

When erection has been achieved, the constriction ring must be placed around your penis.

These instructions are a guide only and it is recommended that you follow the manufacturers' instruction manual, for the particular device you are using.

How do I use the constriction rings?

It is important that you measure your penis accurately with the 'sizing gauge' included with the pump. The ring should encircle the penis and be a comfortable fit without being too tight.

The penis should be flaccid (not hard) when measurement takes place. If in doubt, always start by using a larger size constriction ring to make sure that the constriction on the penis is no more than necessary.

If the constriction ring is too large to maintain an erection, try the next smaller size until you find a ring size that achieves a firm erection without significant bruising around the base of your penis.

If the smallest constriction ring does not hold the erection, try using two constriction rings together. This should hold your erection more firmly.

Different manufacturers have different ranges of measurement, and one type of measurement may differ from another.

If you still have a problem keeping the erection, you can put the constriction rings onto your penis first and then develop the erection with the vacuum pump. This is effective, but the resulting erection may be a little smaller than normal.

N.B. Never wear the constriction ring for more than 30 minutes.

The constriction ring generally inhibits ejaculation, although the use of the constriction ring cannot guarantee this as an effective form of contraception. If using a condom, always place it on the penis after achieving an erection.

Are there any risks involved?

If you follow the instructions carefully, there are no risks. Occasionally, because of the sudden pressure you are putting on the penis, there is a small amount of bruising. Try not to make the penis too firm for intercourse the first few times. The penis will not be used to the sudden high levels of pressure, size and hardness. Increase the firmness of your erection gradually. By using the pump aggressively to achieve a 'fast' erection you can damage the blood vessels around the penis.

There are no latex properties in the manufacturing process of the following: constriction ring/ vacuum pump/penile tube/transfer-sleeve components of the devices recommended by The Pressure Clinic.

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What is the best position for using the vacuum pump?

For the vacuum to have the optimum effect it is best to stand up when using it. However, if this is not possible then try using it lying down flat; this is preferable to using it whilst sitting in a chair. If the erection is slow to develop, try releasing a little of the vacuum with the release button and then apply more vacuum. Repeat this until you get a good erection.

How soon can I expect to achieve an erection?

There is no simple answer. Some men can experience an erection immediately. Others find that their first erection takes many practise sessions, so be patient and practise the procedure by following the instructions given in the user manual.

What about pain?

If you feel pain when you create a vacuum to engorge the penis, lower the vacuum by pressing the release valve. Experience will teach you to find the appropriate vacuum pressure to stimulate an erection without any discomfort. Pain may also be a result of using a constriction ring that is too small. If this is the case, use the next larger size of ring.

If pain continues after taking these precautions, it is recommended that you seek medical advice before reusing the pump.

Do I have to buy a vacuum device?

Some types of vacuum devices are available on prescription. At the request of your spinal consultant you may borrow a vacuum pump for a trial period from The Pressure Clinic. After the trial period you are asked to return the pump and you will be issued with details of how you can obtain your own device from your GP.

If you need further advice or help on how to use your pump either during the trial period or afterwards, you are welcome to contact The Pressure Clinic.

The Pressure Clinic can also be contacted for details of where you can buy a particular type of pump.

When should I not use the pump?

The pump is not suitable for people who are taking anti-coagulants e.g. Warfarin, heparin, dalteparin.

Cleaning and maintenance

The penile tube/transfer sleeve/rings should be washed in warm soapy water only. Do not use alcohol based products or bleach. Rinse well and dry thoroughly. The rings will last longer if dried properly and stored in a plastic bag in a dark place. Petroleum jelly such as Vaseline will damage the rings. Use a water soluble lubricant such as KY Jelly.

The vacuum pump handle or motor casing (depending on your type of device) should need minimal maintenance. It is recommended that this is not submerged into water, but wiped dry with a damp cloth to remove any dirt or lubrication.

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Always replace worn batteries on powered devices to prevent damage to the motor / corrosion of the battery compartment.

Further information

For patients with Spinal Cord Injury there are various methods used to obtain or sustain an erection. These methods can be oral medication, an injection into the penis, a vacuum pump, constriction rings, or a combination of these methods to help with erectile dysfunction.

Remember - what may work for one man may not work for you.

It is important that any concerns you may have regarding erectile dysfunction, as well as all other aspects of sexual function e.g. fertility issues, ejaculation etc should be discussed with your consultant here at the Spinal Centre.

Information is available in different media formats e.g. videos/DVDs/literature.

We recommend the following websites:

The Duke of Cornwall Spinal Treatment Centre: **www.spinalinjurycentre.org.uk**
The Spinal Injuries Association: **www.spinal.co.uk**
The Sexual Advice Association: **www.sda.uk.net**
Owen Mumford Ltd (Rapport): **http://www.owenmumford.com**
iMEDIcare Ltd: **www.imedicare.eu/main.html**

Equipment loans are available from the Pressure Clinic after referral from your spinal consultant.

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